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Linking the Collegiate Well-Being Movement and the Jesuit Tradition

By David Bryngil

Wellness programs began to formally emerge on college campuses in the 1980s. Most commonly rooted in areas of student affairs, such as campus recreation and health services, wellness initiatives were focused on the notion of promoting holistic physical and mental health to students and, in some cases, to faculty and staff as well. The “wellness wheel” became a familiar icon at universities. Professional organizations such as NIRSA: The Leaders in Campus Recreation (NIRSA – National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association) adopted and championed wellness. Over the next three decades collegiate wellness programs continued to expand.

In 2015, the collegiate world began to pivot from a wellness model to a well-being model, with the signing of The Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges. This charter, developed with input from 380 professionals from 45 nations, created a framework to guide the development of Health Promoting Universities and Colleges. The charter created two calls to action for institutions of higher education: to embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration, and in operations and academic mandates, and to lead health-promotion action and collaboration locally and globally. The Okanagan Charter was the launching pad for higher education professionals to reimagine what healthy and well college campuses should look like. Soon the collegiate well-being movement was born.

Embraced widely by both NIRSA and NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators), well-being emerged as an aspirational outcome for higher education. While wellness promotes moving beyond just the absence of physical disease and ailments through the integration of social, men-

tal, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects of health into a person’s life, well-being is derived from Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia*, translated as “happiness” or “human flourishing.” Aristotle believed that a human being must live well and do well in all aspects of life in order to experience true happiness, not just ephemeral pleasures. *Eudaimonia*, when achieved, would result in a person who is thriving in life. This concept is central to the collegiate well-being movement. This movement is also rooted in two other meaningful concepts: that it is the moral responsibility of universities to prepare students not just for better careers but for better lives and that university faculty and staff need to thrive in life just as much as students do. Universities need to have employees who can adequately role-model a pathway to well-being for their students. Saint Ignatius of Loyola stated, “The person who sets about making others better is wasting his or her time, unless he or she begins with himself or herself.”

Ignatius’ idea certainly reinforces the notion that the well-being of a faculty and staff is essential for them to be best positioned to serve students. Thus, the collegiate well-being movement strives to change university culture and mission on their journeys towards “thriving” or “flourishing.”

Inspired by the findings of *Great Jobs, Great Lives: The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report*, the collegiate movement has widely adopted five areas of well-being: Purpose, Social, Financial, Community, and Physical. The report indicates that “the odds of thriving in all areas of well-being more than double for college graduates when they feel their college prepared them well for life outside of it.” As a result of this finding, along with the calls to action from The Okanagan Charter, the collegiate well-being move-

ment has started to blossom. Across North America the wellness model is shifting to a well-being model. In many instances, though, institutions are struggling to align well-being outcomes with their own university missions. Jesuit colleges and universities, however, are uniquely positioned to adopt the well-being model.

In essence, Jesuit education has been fostering well-being for hundreds of years simply by following the Ignatian principles that are the foundation of all of our colleges and universities. Jesuit education has always been rooted in the development of the whole person. Aristotle's philosophy of *Eudaimonia* also promotes the benefits of holistic growth. The classical basis of the collegiate well-being movement and the Jesuit ideal of developing the whole person share a natural synergy that can drive the establishment of well-being programs at Jesuit institutions. Students often choose to enroll at Jesuit schools because they seek the value of a liberal arts education and our commitment to *cura personalis*. Discernment most certainly is beneficial to helping one develop Purpose, and the idea of producing "men and women for others" supports Community and Social dimensions. The Jesuit history of promoting social justice links well to the areas of Purpose, Community, Social, and Financial. *Magis* as a concept is relevant to all of these areas as well.

Our students recognize the Jesuit track record for developing well-rounded, thoughtful individuals. The collegiate well-being movement has emerged with a similar desire to produce graduates who are prepared for life after college because they have had an opportunity to explore "the bigger picture." Well-being challenges colleges to make the long-term existence of their students better. Jesuit education has answered this challenge since its inception. Finally, Jesuit higher education has always

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strived to nurture faculty and staff who embrace Jesuit values and integrate them into their own lives. This application of *cura personalis* to university employees has long been a predecessor to the idea that well-being needs to be fostered in faculty and staff, not just students, in order to have a flourishing campus community.

With the foundation of Jesuit education in place, our colleges and universities should conduct an introspective examination in order to promote a well-being model that is contemporary, relevant, and inclusive of every community member. While campus professionals lead the well-being movement, only the entire institution can develop a truly successful well-being program. A "top down approach," bolstered by true collaboration across divisions and departments, is essential for launching a sustainable well-being initiative.

At Jesuit universities, Mission and Ministry plays a vital role in the support of well-being. Adequately linking our mission to these programs will continue to create a unique, caring environment on our campuses. Step one is building a well-being program with unified vision and institutional commitment. Step two is assessment that identifies areas of strength that already exist on campus, as well as gaps that need to be filled in order to support well-being. Step three is creating a collaborative strategic plan for the implementation and sustainability of well-being. In the end, the marriage of the collegiate well-being movement and Jesuit tradition can only result in a campus community that is better prepared to thrive and flourish.

David Bryngil, the executive director of Wellness & Recreation, has served as a student affairs administrator and adjunct lecturer at Saint Peter's University since 1992.